Minority Student Achievement Network
Invitational Paper Series
2005

MSAN launches a new publication

One of the central tenets of MSAN is to make research accessible to practitioners and to make it central to their decision making. While scholarly journals serve a purpose, we also know that they may be obscure and inaccessible to those in the field looking for immediate classroom implications. We launch this new publication to inform practitioners about topics of immediate interest. For this series MSAN has invited nationally recognized educators to write articles on topics of interest to our members.

MSAN was founded with a mission to eliminate the gap in achievement for African American and Latino students and their White and Asian classmates. In the years since MSAN first stated that challenge, the population of Latino students in our nation's schools has exploded. Achievement issues for Latino students have moved to front and center stage. While there is a considerable body of work around achievement issues for African American students, the literature is less well known for Latino students, but no less complex. With Latino attendance in some of our districts for generations, Hispanic issues transcend issues of language spoken in the home and ESL status, mobility, poverty, and immigration status. Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Nicaraguan and Dominican students (to name a few) each add to the rich geo-political and cultural mix that makes up the population of Latino descent in this hemisphere. This premiere article gives grounding in achievement needs and issues of Latino/Hispanic students in our nation's schools. In our conferences, newsletters and other venues we hope to add to our knowledge of this important part of our mission.

Improving the Education of Latino Students

Martha Zurita, Ph.D.
Institute for Latino Studies
University of Notre Dame

The 2000 Census revealed what many already knew: the Latino population had increased in size, moved into different parts of the country than previously concentrated, and comprised a significant proportion of the nation's overall population (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). In 2002, Latinos represented 13.3 percent of the nation's population. Many schools and districts had been feeling the effects of the Latino growth in their student populations. However, some teachers and administrators found themselves grappling to understand the Latino student population and how to meet their needs. In fact, at the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame, we have received requests from school districts to assist personnel in improving their understanding of Latino students and to collaboratively find ways to better serve them.

This piece is not meant to be a comprehensive review of Latino students and all of the educational issues faced. It does the following: (1) presents key demographic indicators on the Latino population, so as to provide an overview of Latino students; (2) provides a sense of their overall educational performance; (3) discusses the opportunities available to Latino students; and (4) examines implications that arise from this discussion.

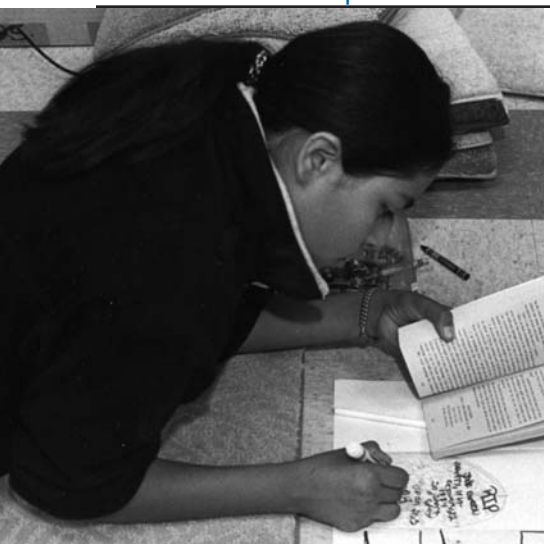
Who are Latino students?

The Latino population is far from being a monolithic group. There is much diversity within the population itself. Unfortunately, due to data collection methods, we tend to use broad brushstrokes when discussing populations, whether they are racial/ethnic, gender, or age groups. There are many factors, such as country of origin, immigration status, and age when immigrated, that impact various outcomes, such as educational attainment levels. The largest Latino group is that of Mexican descent, which account for 66.9 percent of the Latino population (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). The second largest groups are those from the various Central and South American countries, making up 14.3 percent of the Latino population. Puerto Ricans and Cubans are the next largest Latino groups making up 8.6 and 3.7 percent, respectively. This distribution is reflected in the Latino student population.

The Latino student population is also growing significantly. In 2000, Latino students comprised 16 percent of the population younger than 18 years of age, compared to the 12 percent they comprised in 1990. It is projected that in 2020, Latinos will make up almost one-fourth of this age group (Llagas & Snyder, 2003). One major reason for the strong growth in this population is the high fertility rates of Latinas. In 2002, Latinas had a birth rate of 82.0 per 1,000, whereas White women had a birth rate of 56.5 per 1,000 women (Downs, 2003).

Another major reason for the growth of the Latino population is immigration. In 2002, two of five (or 40.2 percent) Latinos were foreign born (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Among the foreign-born Latinos, more than half (52.1 percent) entered the U.S. between 1990 and 2002, which means a

(continued on page 2)



© Alan Pogue 2001

significant portion of the Latino population are recent immigrants, particularly students. In 1999, for example, 65.3 percent of all Latino elementary and high school students had at least one foreign-born parent and/or were foreign born themselves (Jameison, Curry, & Martinez, 2001). The impact of high levels of immigration on students is enormous. One significant issue that often goes unnoticed is the fact that many students may come from homes where their immigrant parents might not be informed or aware of U.S. systems and policies, namely educational, which then limits the type of guidance they can provide their children.

Relative to other racial/ethnic groups, Latinos have lower educational attainment levels, which are largely influenced by their high immigration levels. As a group, more than one-quarter (27 percent) of Latinos have less than a ninth grade education, compared to 4 percent of Whites (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). Similarly, only 11 percent of Latinos have attained bachelor's degrees or higher, compared with almost 30 percent of Whites. However, in examining Latino subgroups, Cubans have relatively higher educational attainment levels than Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, or Central and South Americans. Parents with lower educational attainment levels, as well as immigrant status, may lack the experience or information necessary to guide their children's education that we, as educators, might view as the norm or as expected.

Poverty poses serious challenges to children's access to quality learning opportunities and their potential for school success (Lippman, Burns, McArthur, Burton, Smith, & Kaufman, 1996). We know that educational attainment levels clearly impact poverty status, which for Latinos is impacted by their immigration status. Schools have several methods available to measure student poverty, one of which is student eligibility for the National Free or Reduced Lunch Program. The large majority of Latino students are eligible for the free/reduced lunch program. In 2003, seven of ten (71.4 percent) Latino fourth-graders were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provasnik, Sen, & Tobin, 2004). Clearly, schools and districts with large concentrations of Latino students are faced with the challenges of educating low-income students as well.

How are Latinos faring in schools?

Now that we have a better understanding of demographic factors impacting many Latino students' home contexts, we will examine how Latino students are achieving in schools across the country. Oftentimes, we limit our views of Latino students simply to language, regardless of the label we choose to use. Whether it is English Language Learners (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL) students, Limited English Proficient (LEP) students or bilingual education students, the label is a narrowing view. In this section, we examine Latino student achievement through different perspectives. Regardless of the measures used to examine student achievement, one issue remains consistent: gaps exist in the performance of Latino students and their peers. In this section, we will focus on three common measures of student performance: test scores, high school completion rates, and college enrollment rates.

Test scores

In our country we measure student achievement on the international, national, state, local, and classroom levels and use various tests at each level. One issue is clear: although Latino students are performing better than they have been historically in many areas, their test scores continue to be lower than their White peers (Llagas & Snyder, 2003). In examining the 1999 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, Latinos' average NAEP scores were a minimum of 21 points less than their White counterparts, regardless of the subject or the age group (9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds). Another disturbing finding was that when student performance was analyzed by parental educational attainment levels, the gap between Latino and White students still persisted, which was counter to many people's thinking. However, it would be important to create a comprehensive view of the test disparities – not simply the tests and parental educational attainment levels, but also immigration status and economic indicators, such as poverty status.

High school completion rates

There are two types of high school dropout rates commonly reported: event and status. Both rates are higher for Latinos relative to other racial/ethnic groups. The annual, or event, dropout rate for Latino students from 10th to 12th grade in 1999 was 7.1 percent, which was almost double the rate for White students (Jamieson, Curry, & Martinez, 2001). The status dropout rate is the percentage of young adults, ages 16 to 24, who are out of school and have not earned a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate. The status dropout rate for Latinos is relatively high; in 2000, according to Kaufman, Alt & Chapman (as cited in Llagas & Snyder, 2003), the rate for Latinos was 28 percent, compared to 7 percent for Whites and 13 percent for African Americans. However, the status dropout rate included those individuals who were foreign born and did not complete high school whether in the U.S. or their native countries, which for Latinos was a significant number. In 2000, the status dropout rate for Latinos born outside of the U.S. was 44 percent and the rate for first-generation Latinos was 15 percent, which was significantly less than their foreign-born counterparts, but still

higher than their White and African American counterparts. Intuitively, it would make sense that the Latino dropout rate would decrease with each generation in the U.S. However, research informs us that dropout rates decrease with each generation until the second generation, and then increase at the third generation (Fry & Lowell, 2003; Kaufman et al, 2003; Suro & Passel, 2003). Furthermore, both first- and second-generation Latinos are still more likely to dropout than their peers from other racial/ethnic groups.

College enrollment rates

Given the dropout rates of Latinos, it is expected that their high school graduation rates follow the same trends -- Latinos are less likely to complete high school programs relative to their African American and White counterparts. In 2000, 64 percent of Latinos aged 18 to 24 years completed high school, compared to 92 percent of Whites and 84 percent of Blacks (Llagas & Snyder, 2003).

Since Latino students are not graduating high school at comparable rates as their peers, it is not surprising that they are not enrolling in college at comparable rates either. And although the college attendance rate of Latinos has increased between 1980 and 2000, their enrollment rates are still lower than their White peers (Llagas & Snyder, 2003). When Latinos are enrolled in college, they are disproportionately enrolled in two-year colleges. In 2000, Latinos comprised 10 percent of the total postsecondary enrollment. In the same year, they accounted for 14 percent of all students in 2-year colleges and 7 percent of students in 4-year institutions.

What opportunities do Latinos have to succeed?

It is not enough to simply examine Census data to provide us with a demographic profile of Latino students by which to create a better understanding of the students we serve. Nor is it enough to simply examine Latino achievement rates and realize that they are underperforming relative to their peers. In order to fully understand Latino students in the U.S., we have to critically examine their access to programs that would provide them with opportunities to succeed in and out of school. In this section, we will examine Latino student access into early childhood education and care programs and racially balanced schools, as well as their availability to computers and Internet at home.

Early childhood education and care programs

Participation in quality early childhood care and education programs such as Head Start and pre-kindergarten can help children prepare for elementary school. Children can learn valuable school readiness skills, such as socializing with peers and early literacy. Participation in such programs is invaluable for at-risk children and children of immigrants whose primary language at home is not English, both of which may be the case for many Latino students.

© Alan Pogue 2001

In 2001, less than 40 percent of Latino children aged 3 – 5 were enrolled in center-based early childhood care and education programs, compared to 63.7 percent of African American and 59.0 percent of White children in the same age group (Llagas & Snyder, 2003). Participation in many early childhood care programs are closely linked with family income, even though Head Start and other locally funded early childhood programs are available to some children from low-income families (Llagas & Snyder, 2003). Many times early childhood programs that are privately paid for by parents may be out of reach for Latino families who might benefit the most from these types of programs. In fact, Schulman (as cited on Children's Defense Fund website) reported that full-day childcare costs parents at least as much as, if not more than, tuition at a public college or university.

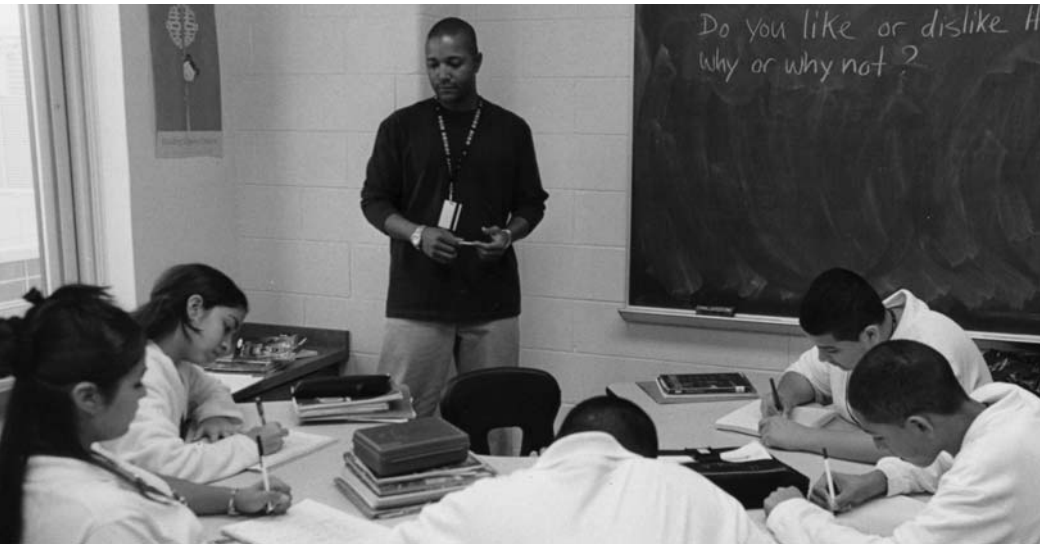
Segregation

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream that Black children would go to school with White children. Unfortunately, Dr. King's cherished dream has not been realized and the pool of segregated students has grown; many Latino students now attend highly segregated schools (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003). These schools not only have high concentrations of minority students, but also low-income students. In 2003, the majority of Latino fourth-grade students (51 percent) were enrolled in the highest poverty schools, which were defined as schools where 75 percent or more of students were eligible for free/reduced lunch (Wirt et al, 2004). In the same year, more than half (56.4 percent) of Latino fourth-graders were enrolled in schools where 75 percent or more of students were racial/ethnic minorities.

Clearly, attending racially and economically segregated schools are not optimal educational settings for students. One significant issue in segregated schools is teacher quality. Research informs us that schools with high concentrations of low-income or minority students have higher rates of unqualified teachers, who are defined as out-of-field teaching or teachers who have not majored in the subject they are teaching and are not certified in the subject. These factors undoubtedly affect the quality of education that students receive (Wirt et al, 2004). Schools with higher concentrations of minority students, which are schools where Latinos are concentrated, also have higher student to counselor ratios, which decreases the attention an individual student might receive (Wirt et al, 2004).

Computer and Internet access

In this day and age, many students have computers in their homes with Internet access, which are great tools by which to foster learning and curiosity of the world around them. Many individuals cannot imagine life without computers and Internet access. However, the fact is that Latino students by far have less access to computers and the Internet in their homes, which has been coined as "the digital divide" between White and minority communities. In 1998, approximately one-fourth of Latinos in grades 1 –12 had computers in their households, compared to 70 percent of White students (Llagas & Snyder, 2003). Similarly, less than 10 percent of Latinos had Internet access at home, compared with one-third of White students. Clearly, family income is a factor in computer ownership and Internet access, which is a major issue for Latino students, as illustrated earlier. However, it is important for educators to be aware that "the digital divide" exists and that Latino students may not have similar levels of access to information outside of school as educators might think. At a practical level, this information might persuade teachers to reconsider deadlines for homework assignments that utilize computers and Internet access, particularly if students live in largely disadvantaged communities where many might not have computer access in their homes and must resort to public computers, such as the library.



© Alan Pogue 2001

Next steps: Practice and policy

Due to the large amounts of Latino immigration in recent years, many believe that all Latinos are immigrants and that these educational issues are new phenomena, which could not be further from the truth. There is a wealth of research on proven practices with Latino students, as well as needed policies to benefit all children, such as more access to early childhood education. The growth and movement of Latinos since the 1990s leave many communities feeling as though they do not know where to begin in helping their Latino students succeed. The author invites readers to research educational practices that have created Latino student success and select practices that are appropriate for your community and student needs. The following four strategies are incredibly simple at first read, but one might find them more difficult to implement.

1. *Use data to understand your student population* – Using national and/or local data is an excellent and cost-effective way to understand the communities served by a school or district, particularly for use by school administrators and politicians. This is particularly true given the fact that the Internet has made information easy to access. However, school districts may still encounter problems finding data specific to their districts' geographic boundaries. There are several websites that provide district-specific data, including most states' departments of education. One such website is the National Center for Education Statistics, which provides Census data at the district level for both the 1990 and 2000 Census (http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/).

   Data collected at the classroom and school level are also essential to understanding students, as well as crucial to improving their performance. Whether the data are results from standardized tests, teacher-developed assessments, or student surveys, this type of information could inform practitioners and administrators about the programs, teaching methods, and school practices that are producing the best results for students.

2. *Review your practices* – Is your Latino representation in specific programs, such as Advanced Placement classes, representative of their overall composition? For example, in one high school that I assisted, Latinos made up almost 25 percent of their enrollment. However, they made up 50 percent of the dropouts, 50 percent of the expulsions, and 40 percent of the school suspensions. My suggestion to this district was to track the type of discipline by the student's race/ethnicity and gender, as well as that of the disciplinarian, and the reason for the discipline. These types of basic in-house analyses could reveal any inequitable treatment and/or participation in programs for all student groups.

3. *Reach out to Latino parents* – Reaching out to all parents is key to building strong home-school relationships and ensuring that parents are truly partners in their children's education. However, schools might find that communication with parents is more difficult if the home language is not English. First, they may find it cumbersome and/or expensive to translate letters home. Then some may find that translated letters may not have enough of a desired

(continued on page 5)

impact, which leave them questioning if it was worth the financial investment. Additionally, many schools do not have fully bilingual staff who can communicate with parents on an on-going basis (i.e. non-instructional staff). As such, when Spanish-speaking parents come to school for meetings, there is no one with whom they can effectively communicate. I recently worked with a school district that had difficulty connecting with the Latino parents due to language, lack of bilingual personnel funding.

My suggestion was that they consider a collaborative effort between schools and community-based organizations. I have witnessed several successful community and school partnerships in the Chicagoland region that effectively increased parent involvement and developed community leaders who were champions for their local schools.

4. *Highlight the Latino population's assets* - Every individual and group of students has assets that they bring to school. As educators, we identify and utilize students' assets and how they could help their peers learn in ways that might not be possible otherwise. Many school districts have found innovative ways to do just this. For example, administrators, teachers, and parents alike understand that bilingualism is an asset for all students through the implementation of dual language programs, where native English and Spanish speakers learn and benefit from one another. The implications of these programs go far beyond language and future economic benefits to students. In essence, these programs eliminate educational segregation of Latino students and create spaces where all students can learn tolerance for diversity.

As a country, our future is inextricably tied to the success of all students, educational and otherwise. To date, we have yet to figure out an equation for successfully educating Latino students. Given the population projections, Latino students are an increasingly important part of our national success. As such, it is in our country's best interest to become aware of and understand this population and their children, invest in the best approaches to educating our local communities, and implement these approaches, educational and otherwise, to ensure that Latino students are being educated to the best of our capabilities.

© Alan Pogue 2001

About the Author

Martha Zurita is a Senior Research Analyst at the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Zurita directs the Institute's educational initiatives through research and technical assistance to schools and community-based organizations throughout the metropolitan Chicago region. Throughout her career, she has examined issues pertaining to Latino students at all levels of the educational pipeline – from early childhood education to graduate school. She has also been involved with Latino education from many perspectives: as a policy analyst and advocate, an educator, a researcher, and a program consultant and developer.

The Institute for Latino Studies, in keeping with the distinctive mission, values, and traditions of the University of Notre Dame, promotes understanding and appreciation of the social, cultural, and religious life of U.S. Latinos through advancing research, expanding knowledge, and strengthening community. More information on the Institute for Latino Studies, such as our publications, can found at http://www.nd.edu/~latino/.

References

Downs, B. (2003). *Fertility of American Women: June 2002* (Current Population Reports P20-548). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Frankenberg, E., Lee, C., & Orfield, G. (2003). *A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?* Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project.

Fry, R., & Lowell, B. L. (2003). *Work or Study: Different Fortunes of U.S. Latino Generations.* Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Jameison, A., Curry, A., & Martinez, G. (2001). *School Enrollment in the United States – Social and Economic Characteristics of Students* (Current Population Reports P20-533). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Lippman, L., Burns, S., McArthur, E., Burton, R., Smith, T., & Kaufman, P. (1996). *Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty* (NCES 96-184). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Llagas, C., & Snyder, T. D. (2003). *Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics* (NCES 2003-008). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Ramirez, R. R., & de la Cruz, G. P. (2003). *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 2002* (Current Population Reports P20-545). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Schulman, K. (2000). *Issue Brief: The High Cost of Child Care Puts Quality Care Out of Reach for Many Families.* Retrieved (January 20, 2005), from http://childrensdefense.org/earlychildhood/childcare/basics.asp

Suro, R., & Passel, J. S. (2003). *The Rise of the Second Generation: Changing Patterns in Hispanic Population Growth.* Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Wirt, J., Choy, S., Rooney, P., Provasnik, S., Sen, A., & Tobin, R. (2004). *The Condition of Education 2004* (NCES 2004-077). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

The Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) was established to discover, develop, and implement the means to ensure the high academic achievement of students of color. MSAN was created and is run by schools – administrators and teachers who have made issues of student achievement their top priority.

We believe we can bring about the desired changes in student achievement through conducting research, engaging in interventions and convening key stakeholders. MSAN, in collaboration with its member districts, is working toward the following strategic goals:

- Create a body of educational research that informs classroom and system-level practice and helps eliminate racial achievement gaps
- Provide information to MSAN members regarding effective practices learned or developed by the MSAN
- Create self-sustaining structures and the capacity to acquire and maintain goals in MSAN districts
- Inform local, state and national stakeholders on issues related to racial achievement gaps
- Build upon and enhance the student voice and leadership within our member districts

Minority Student Achievement Network Districts

Supt. Allan Alson, Evanston (IL) Township High School (President)
Supt. Hardy Murphy, Evanston/Skokie (IL) Elementary School District 65 (Vice President)
Supt. Susan Bridge, Oak Park and River Forest (IL) High School (Treasurer)
Supt. John (Jack) Fagan, Oak Park (IL) Elementary School District (Secretary)
Supt. Frank Alvarez, Montclair (NJ) Public Schools
Supt. Alida Begina, Hamden (CT) Public Schools
Supt. Arthur R. Culver, Champaign (IL) Unit 4 School District
Supt. Deborah S. Delisle, Cleveland Heights-University Heights (OH) City School District
Supt. Elizabeth E. Feser, Windsor (CT) Public Schools
Supt. George Fornero, Ann Arbor (MI) Public Schools
Supt. Thomas Fowler-Finn, Cambridge (MA) Public Schools
Supt. Mark Freeman, Shaker Heights (OH) City School District
Supt. Jere Hochman, Amherst-Pelham (MA) Regional School District
Supt. Debra Jackson, Bedford (NY) Central School District
Supt. William H. Lupini, The Public Schools of Brookline (MA)
Supt. Robert Maxfield, Farmington (MI) Public Schools
Supt. Daniel A. Nerad, Green Bay (WI) Area Public Schools
Supt. Neil Pedersen, Chapel Hill-Carrboro (NC) City Schools
Supt. Art Rainwater, Madison (WI) Metropolitan School District
Supt. Michael N. Riley, Bellevue (WA) School District
Supt. George Russell, Eugene (OR) School District
Supt. Morton Sherman, Cherry Hill (NJ) Public Schools
Supt. Robert G. Smith, Arlington (VA) Public Schools
Supt. Judy Wilson, Princeton (NJ) Regional Schools

Minority Student Achievement Network

1600 Dodge Avenue, Evanston, IL 60204
Phone 847-424-7185 • Fax 847-424-7192 • www.msanetwork.org

Ann Hunwick, Administrative Assistant
Gerald Leibforth, Business Manager
Rossi Ray-Taylor, Executive Director
Editor, Patricia Maunsell
Designed by Melissa Chapko